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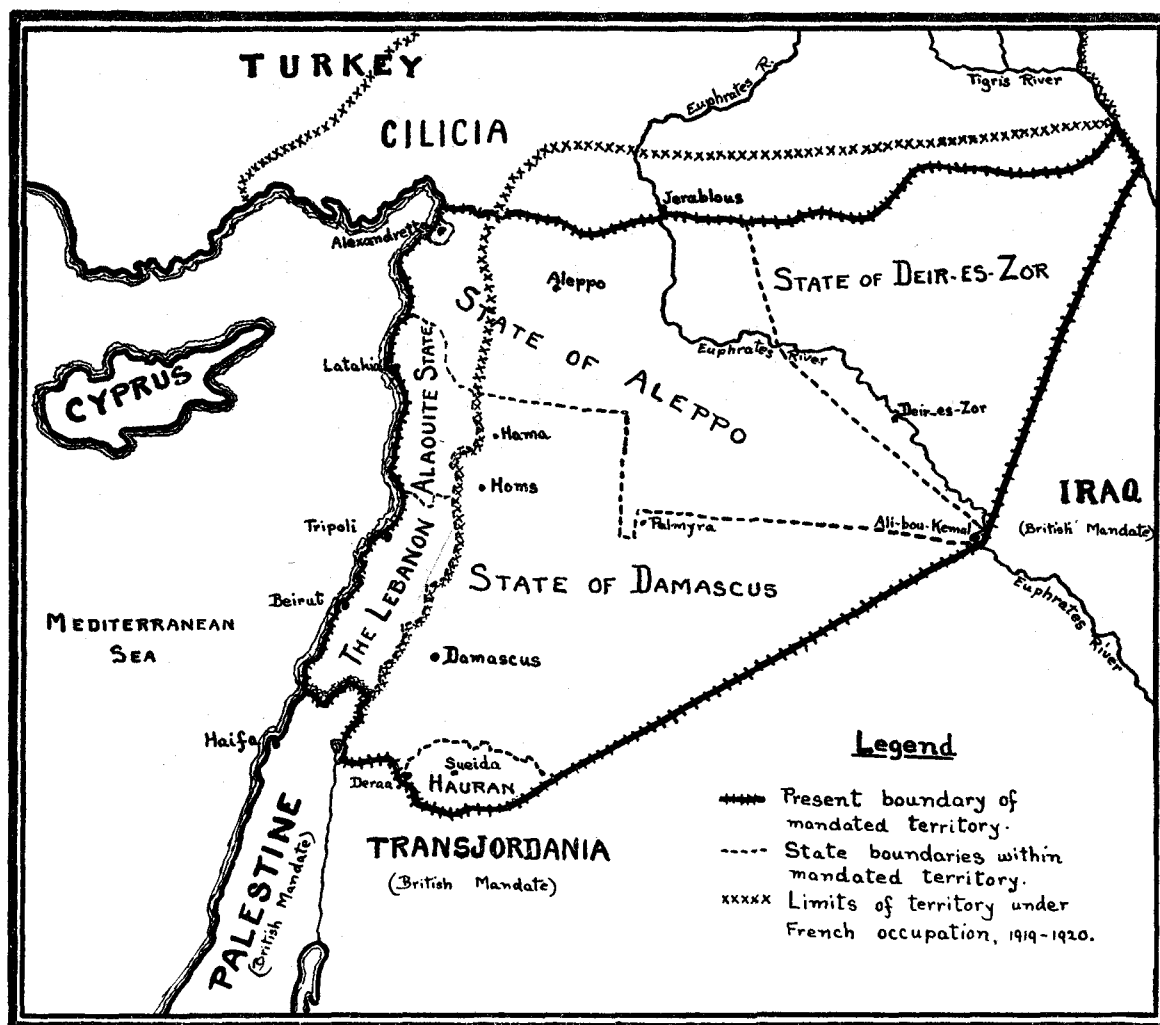
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THE FRENCH MANDATE IN SYRIA



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SKETCH MAP OF SYRIA

The recent armed uprising in Syria, which has been followed by the recall of the French High Commissioner and the appointment of a new civil governing authority, has focussed attention on the extremely critical situation in the French mandated territory. This Report gives a brief factual account of how the French mandate was established, and the development of the Syrian nationalist movement.

THE FRENCH MANDATE IN SYRIA

THE MANDATED TERRITORY.

The French mandate in Syria covers an area of approximately 60,000 square miles and embraces a population which is predominantly of Arab origin but also includes Turks, Circassians, Jews, Turcomans, Kurds, Persians, a few Europeans and several thousand refugee Armenians. Besides these there are remnants of the diverse peoples which from time to time occupied the country before the coming of the Arabs. Syria contains a wide variety of religious sects including Sunnite and Shiite Moslems, Christians of many creeds and denominations, Jews, Yezidis, and Druzes. Together these various elements make up a population estimated at more than 3,000,000. Except in the Alexandretta region Arabic is commonly used as the medium of conversation.

FRENCH INTERESTS IN SYRIA.

French interests in Syria are primarily sentimental. The French people have for centuries cherished the traditions founded by French crusaders in the Levant. The government of France has long claimed a protectorate over Christians of all sects living under Ottoman dominion. Religious and educational foundations subsidized by French public funds have been a medium for the dissemination of French culture in Syria, and the French language has become the medium of conversation in educated Syrian society. The people of the Lebanon are especially indebted to France for the degree of political autonomy they have enjoyed since 1864 when France forced Turkey to set apart their territory under a governor approved by European powers signatory to the Treaty of Paris. The long history of French philanthropic activities in Syria served to give France a position of special prestige among Syrians. The French people, on their part, were conscious of an attachment for Syria quite unconnected with such commercial enterprises of French nationals as the silk factories, street-car companies, flour mills, banks, agricultural enterprises, railroads, wharves and docks, which represented, after all, only a very small fraction of French investments abroad.

THE MANDATE THEORY.

In theory the mandate principle proposed by General Smuts and President Wilson (which was agreed to with some reluctance by the Council of Ten at Paris and incorporated in the Treaty of Versailles as Article 22 of the Covenant) extended to peoples not yet able to stand by themselves a promise of security for their well-being and development under the tutelage of advanced nations acting as Mandatories on behalf of the League. Mandates were divided into three types, according to the degree of development attained by the communities concerned. Syria, Palestine and Iraq were constituted Class A mandates, described as communities which had reached a stage of development where their existence as independent nations could be provisionally recognized, subject to the rendering of administrative advice and assistance by a Mandatory until such

time as they were able to stand alone. It was stipulated that in the selection of the Mandatary the wishes of these communities should be a principal consideration. The degree of authority, control, or administration to be exercised by the Mandatary was to be explicitly defined by either the Members of the League or by the League Council. A permanent commission was to receive and examine annual reports of Mandataries and advise the League Council on all matters relating to the observance of the mandates.

THE MANDATE IN PRACTICE.

In practice there has been a marked divergence from the original plan outlined above. (For text of Mandates scheme see Article 22 of the Covenant of the League of Nations). The choice of the Mandatory Power was in the case of each Class A mandate based on previous secret agreements between France and Great Britain rather than on the wishes of the inhabitants themselves. Terms of the mandates were drafted not by the League of Nations but by France and Great Britain acting in collaboration. Only in the case of Iraq was a provisional recognition of independence granted, with an assurance that the mandatory relationship would terminate as soon as the territory had developed an army strong enough for self-protection. The role of the League was limited largely to confirming the mandates awarded by the Allies to themselves on their own terms. And once having confirmed the mandates the League has had no power to revoke them. It is charged solely with the duty of seeing that the terms of the mandates are carried out.

In the present Syrian crisis no League inquiry has as yet been instituted to determine the manner in which the terms of the mandate have been met by the French authorities. The Permanent Mandates Commission has merely instructed the French Government to submit in February a fuller report on political activities in the mandated area during the year 1925.

A striking anomaly in the case of the Syrian mandate was the manner of its inauguration. As will be seen later, the French occupation of Syria began in September 1919, five months before the mandate was awarded to France in April 1920; it was not until December 1920 that the terms of the draft mandate were submitted by France to the League Council and the formal approval of the draft mandate was delayed until July 24, 1922. The mandate did not go into effect officially until its promulgation on September 29, 1923.

HOW FRANCE OCCUPIED SYRIA.

1. The Secret Sykes-Picot Treaty. The divergence between the actual status of Syria and that contemplated in the Covenant is explicable only in the light of negotiations which took place between Great Britain and France before the League was established. These negotiations were epitomized in the secret agreement of May 16, 1916, generally known as the Sykes-Picot Treaty, in which it was agreed that certain largely non-Turkish Provinces of the Ottoman Empire should be partitioned between the Allies. French

claims for special consideration in Syria were met by a promise of full control over the coastal strip of Syria. To this territory the greater part of Cilicia was added. Great Britain was to receive the southern part of Mesopotamia and the ports of Acre and Haifa in Palestine.

In 1915, however, Great Britain had secured the armed assistance of Hussein, the Sherif of Mecca, by means of a promise of British support for an independent Arab confederation embracing all the Arabic-speaking sections of the Ottoman Empire exclusive of the Syrian coastal strip. The only reservations made by Great Britain were that special measures of administrative control would be necessary in the vilayets of Baghdad and Basrah in Lower Mesopotamia, and that British promises applied only to those portions of the designated territory in which Great Britain was free to act without detriment to the interest of her ally France. In confirmation of this promise it was stipulated in the Sykes-Picot agreement that the zone between Mesopotamia and the Syrian coastal strip should form either a confederation of Arab states or one independent Arab state. Hussein was not a party to this agreement. His interests, however, were affected by the further stipulation that the northern section of the Arab zone was to be a French sphere of influence, the southern a British sphere of influence.

2. Franco-Arab Disagreement. Not long after the adoption of the mandatory principle at the Peace Conference it became apparent that French and Arab expectations were mutually incompatible.

a. Choice of Mandatary. Although the Arabs expected to have a voice in the selection of the Mandatary Power for Syria, France refused to consider the wishes of the population. When an International Commission was proposed by President Wilson to study the wishes of the people in regard to a mandate, the French Government, like the British, failed to appoint representatives to serve. As a result the American section of the Commission proceeded alone, under the leadership of Henry C. King and Charles R. Crane, to investigate local sentiment. No attention was paid by French statesmen to the adverse report presented by the King-Crane Commission on its return from a tour of Syria, Palestine and Cilicia. The report was based on 1863 petitions from representative groups of people in various towns and villages. Of these petitions 73 1/2% had asked for an independent Syria (i.e. a Syria free from foreign political control but willing to accept economic and technical assistance from a Mandatary); 60 1/2% gave the United States first choice as Mandatary; 55.3% gave second choice to Great Britain; 60 1/2% expressed antipathy toward France; 55.3% contained condemnations of Article 22 of the League Covenant, and almost as many protested against secret treaties dividing Syria without the consent of the Syrians. In only 14.68% of the petitions was France named as first choice for Mandatary. Of this group, 79% emanated from the Lebanon district, which owed to France the degree of political autonomy it had enjoyed for the last fifty years of the Turkish regime.

The United States having shown its unwillingness to undertake mandates in Asia, and Great Britain having declared in accordance with the spirit of the Sykes-Picot Treaty that it would not under any circumstances accept the mandate for Syria, the way was prepared for the Supreme Allied Council at its San Remo meeting (April 24, 1920) to designate France as the Mandatory for Syria, thereby confirming the de facto French occupation and overriding the expressed wishes of the inhabitants.

b. Conflicting Claims for the Interior. Another discordant factor in Franco-Arab relations was the French desire that the coastal strip and the interior of Syria (i.e. the territory described in the secret agreement as the French zone of influence) be treated as a unit as far as the mandatory status was concerned. The Arabs, on the contrary, expected full independence for the interior, with no foreign assistance except that for which they themselves might ask and pay. As the Allies had found it unnecessary to establish mandates for Central Arabia, the Hedjaz, Asir, Al-Hasa and Yemen, the need for a mandate in the more advanced Aleppo-Damascus region appeared to be obscure. Moreover the Allies had declared to the Syrians by a proclamation of November 7, 1918 that they had no other desire than to assure by their support and active assistance the normal functioning of the governments which the populations might freely give themselves. (See Appendix A.) On the occasion of the withdrawal of General Allenby's troops from Syria only a year later the Allies had agreed that the incoming French troops should occupy only Cilicia and the Syrian coastal strip, leaving the interior of Syria to be held by the Arabs themselves. This had been regarded as a step toward the fulfilment of Great Britain's war pledges to Hussein. There was no disposition on the part of the Arabs to exchange for French mandatory control the independence these events had led them to expect.

3. Events of 1920. The Arabs of the interior accordingly rejected the French mandate (May 1920) and proclaimed the independence of the recently established Syrian kingdom whose capital was at Damascus. The French Government suspected Great Britain of having encouraged this action for the purpose of restricting French power in Syria. At the moment French troops were preoccupied in Cilicia where a losing struggle with the Turkish Nationalists was engaging the attention of General Gouraud and his assistants. But after the evacuation of Cilicia General Gouraud was able to enter upon a campaign for the extension of the mandate in Syria. An ultimatum was delivered to the Emir Feisal, new-made King of Syria, demanding among other things that within four days the French mandate be accepted. King Feisal acquiesced, but a delay by a French official in transmitting his telegram of acceptance resulted in an order for a French advance on Damascus, the imposition of a second more severe ultimatum, an Arab appeal to arms, and finally the French occupation of Damascus by force on July 25, 1920.

The "zone of French influence" was thus added to the mandated territory of Syria, although the action was contrary to the terms of Article 22 of the Covenant, and to the spirit and letter of the Joint Allied Declaration of November 7, 1918. At this date the first step had not yet been taken by the League of Nations toward

confirming the French mandate in Syria. Moreover, the terms under which France had taken over the country from General Allenby expressly stipulated that the French occupation should be confined to Cilicia and the Syrian coastal strip. No attempt has been made by the French Government to reconcile its course of action with its pledges to the Arabs or with its solemn treaty obligations. Consequently it has been charged by Syrian nationalists that the annexationist spirit of the secret Sykes-Picot Treaty has prevailed over the lofty idealism of Article 22 of the Covenant, which also is Article 22 of Part I of the Treaty of Versailles.

THE NATIONALIST MOVEMENT.

The Syrian nationalist movement, culminating in the recent armed insurrection, has passed through three distinct phases, the main outlines of which are traced in the brief synopsis which follows:

I. Early Manifestations. It was in the period preceding the establishment of the French mandate that the Nationalist movement assumed definite form. A chronology of the more significant events is sufficient indication of its rapid development.

1. 1909. A Syrian separatist movement set on foot under the Turkish regime.
2. 1915-1918. Arab nationalists cooperate with British forces in their successful campaign to liberate Syria from the Turks.
3. 1919. Arab troops under the Emir Feisal remain in charge of the interior after the evacuation of Syria by General Allenby.
4. June-July, 1919. Strong nationalist sentiments expressed during the visit of the King-Crane Commission.
5. March 11, 1920. A "Syrian Congress" convoked at Damascus. Made up of 135 leaders, some elected, others co-opted, claiming to represent all Syria, including Palestine and the Lebanon. Proclamation of an independent Syrian kingdom under the Emir Feisal--an unsuccessful attempt to forestall the awarding of the Syrian mandate to France at the San Remo Conference.
6. May 1920. Rejection of the French mandate by the Damascus government.
7. July 1920. Imposition of the French mandate upon the interior by threat of arms, Damascus remaining a center of dissatisfied faction.

II. Manifestations under French Regime (July 1920-July 1925)

1. Syrian Complaints. Specific complaints against the form assumed by the French administration were voiced on various oc-

casions by Syrian nationalists. Among the outstanding grievances were the following:

The division of Syria into several distinct states was contrary to the Allied undertaking of Nov. 7, 1918 that an end would be brought to the political division of Syria too long exploited by the Turks. Specific charges were made that the system was adopted for the purpose of consolidating regions where the French were generally popular and splitting up those where opinion was hostile.

French governors had been appointed in some of the states where native governors would have been preferred. Native governors and native members of state executive bodies were unable to promulgate decrees or adopt administrative measures without the sanction of their French colleagues. Elections to Representative Councils were long delayed. In practice most legislative measures were initiated by the High Commissioner.

Until 1925 all High Commissioners had been military officials. General Gouraud (Nov. 1919-May 1923) General Weygand (May 1923-Nov. 1924); General Sarrail (Nov. 1924-Nov. 1925).

An inflated paper currency had been imposed upon Syria. Notes were issued so far in excess of its capital by the "Banque de Syrie" that by July 1925 a Syrian piastre was worth only half of a Turkish piastre.

Taxes were levied by the High Commissioner in the interests of France rather than in consideration of the economic requirements of Syria.

The occupying authorities apparently intended to perpetuate in Syria a purely colonial administration;--the independence of Syria had not been given provisional recognition, no tentative date had been set for termination of the mandate, and no sincere effort was being made to prepare Syria for national independence.

2. Nationalist Activities. It had not been safe under the administrations of Gouraud and Weygand for Nationalist societies to hold meetings. The most radical organization of this period was the Liberal-Democratic Party of Beirut, founded soon after the arrival of Gouraud. It included many nationalists in its membership but published as its ostensible object the working out of a practicable scheme for Franco-Syrian cooperation.

It was not until March 1925 that an avowedly nationalist organization was founded on the strength of a suggestion from Sarrail that delegations to the High Commissioner would be more successful if they had the support of well-organized groups. The new People's Party included in its demands recognition of Syrian national sovereignty; the right of Syria to choose its own form of government; unification of the country; freedom of speech and of the press; the right of trial before banishment, imprisonment or other punishment;

compulsory universal education.

At least one insurrection has occurred in each year since the French occupation began. These have been significant from a psychological but not from a military point of view. During the period troops were steadily reduced from about 70,000 in 1920 to about 15,000 in June 1925.

III. The 1925 Insurrection. The most spectacular activities of the Nationalists have occurred in the period since July 1925. The outcome of the present insurrection is uncertain, but it has been attended by two phenomena worth noting, the unification of Syrians of many creeds and racial stocks who have formerly refused to cooperate, and the transition from a demand for a more liberal French administration to a demand for complete independence from mandatory control.

The most important phases of the insurrection have been as follows:

1. July 1925. The Druzes of the Hauran, a warlike and hitherto unsubdued sect living in the mountainous region south of Damascus, appeal to arms in face of High Commissioner Sarraill's refusal to remove Captain Carbillet, appointed by Weygand as Governor of the Hauran.
2. July to October 1925. Continued hostilities in the Hauran, marked by the annihilation of a French relief column, a two-months' siege of the French garrison at Sueida, Druze incursions northward toward Damascus, the arrival of 10,000 French reinforcements, the subsequent relief of Sueida, and a temporary lull in activities of the Druze warriors as French troops concentrated in the Hauran for a final attack.
3. September, 1925. An outbreak in the Homs region, north of Damascus.
4. October 19-25, 1925. Outbreak of insurrection in Damascus area, nationalists within the city acting in cooperation with Druze leaders outside. Growing demand for absolute independence.
5. Oct. 18-20, 1925. Bombardment of Damascus by French authorities; imposition of rifle and money fine on populace.
6. Oct. 25-Nov. 15, 1925. Insurrection spreading northward to Homs area and thence westward; operations continue in Damascus area.
7. Nov. 6, 1925. Insurrection begins to spread southwestward from Damascus, reaching the southern Lebanon by Nov. 13 where operations continue at date of writing, (Nov. 27). State of Lebanon itself still quiet. Alaouite district and city of Aleppo not affected.

THE FRENCH VIEWPOINT.

Administering the mandate for Syria has entailed an expenditure of money and lives disproportionate to the advantages so far derived from the mandatory relationship by either France or Syria. The cost to France has already been in excess of 3 billion francs. French casualties (Algerian and Senegalese troops, Spahis and French officers) have exceeded 6,500. Trade between France and Syria is on the increase, but in 1924 English exports to Syria still exceeded French exports, and Syria's exports to Turkey and Palestine exceeded its exports to France. Syrian trade forms an insignificant fraction of the total trade of France. Yet the occupying authorities have built roads and canals in Syria, drained marshes, conducted experiments in cotton growing and sericulture and erected public buildings. In the years 1919-1922 inclusive 6,306,000 francs were expended on public education, 10,000,000 francs on works of public utility, and 76,100,000 francs on public and charitable work. But the return on these investments has been small. During the same period France spent 1,782,000,000 francs on the upkeep of troops in Syria.

Economic depression and political unrest have so militated against the normal development of Syria that there has been a growing demand in France for relinquishment of the mandate. Public opinion was especially stirred by the Damascus bombardment and the loss of life, property and French prestige involved thereby. The French Government took immediate action. It replaced General Sarrail by a civilian High Commissioner, Senator Henri de Jouvenel, formerly French delegate to the League of Nations. Through him a new Syrian policy was announced--a policy for which, it is said, the cooperation of British authorities has been secured. A promise was made that Syria would be unified. Opportunity would be given for Syrian citizens to express their views to the new High Commissioner, who would act, as far as possible, in accordance with the wishes of the inhabitants. The first duties of High Commissioner de Jouvenel, however, are to pacify the country and to consolidate the French mandate. For this purpose additional troops have been landed in Syria, the total strength of French forces being placed now at 30,000.

APPENDIX A

ANGLO-FRENCH DECLARATION OF POLICY, NOVEMBER 7, 1918.

"The end aimed at by France and Great Britain in their carrying out of the war in the East unloosed by German ambition, is the complete and final enfranchisement of the peoples so long oppressed by the Turks, and the establishment of national governments and administrations drawing their authority from the initiative and free choice of the native populations.

"To fulfil these purposes, France and Great Britain have agreed to encourage and help the establishment of native governments and administrations in Syria and Mesopotamia, which have been freed by the Allies, and in the territories whose liberation they are now pursuing, and to recognize these as soon as they are effectively established. Far from wishing to impose upon the populations of these regions any particular institutions, the Allies have no other desire than to assure, by their support and by an effective assistance, the normal functioning of the governments and administrations which the populations have freely given themselves. To assure an impartial and equal justice for all, to facilitate the economic development of the country by helping and encouraging local initiative, to favour the spread of education, to bring to an end Turkish political divisions, too long exploited, is the role which the two Allied Governments assume in the liberated territories."

APPENDIX B

SUMMARY OF TERMS OF FRENCH MANDATE FOR SYRIA AND THE LEBANON.

(For full text see Minutes of the Council of the League July 17-24, 1922. p. 1013)

Article 1. An Organic Law for Syria and the Lebanon to be framed in agreement with the native authorities. Measures to be enacted to facilitate the progressive development of Syria and the Lebanon as independent states. Local autonomy to be encouraged.

Article 2. Mandatary may maintain troops in the territory for its defence. Any local militia to be under local authorities, subject to the authority and control which the Mandatary shall retain over these forces. To be used only for defence and the maintenance of order. Nothing to preclude Syria and the Lebanon from contributing to the cost of maintaining the forces of the Mandatary stationed in the territory.

Article 3. Mandatary to have exclusive control over foreign relations of Syria and the Lebanon.

Article 4. No part of the territory to be ceded or leased or placed under the control of a foreign power.

Article 5. Capitulations abolished for duration of mandate.

Article 6. A judicial system to be established which will assure right of natives and foreigners.

Article 8. Complete religious freedom; equality before the law; encouragement of public instruction--the latter to be given through medium of native languages; communities to retain right of maintaining their own schools subject to general requirements of administration.

Article 11. No economic discrimination against other nations. The Mandatary may impose such taxes and customs duties as it considers necessary and take steps to ensure development of natural resources of the country and to safeguard the interests of the local population. The Mandatary may create no monopoly of natural resources in its own favour or in that of its nationals.

Article 15. On coming into force of the Organic Law an arrangement to be made between the Mandatary and local governments for reimbursement by the latter of all expenses incurred by the Mandatary in organizing the administration, developing local resources, and carrying out permanent public works, of which the country retains the benefit.

Article 16. Arabic and French to be the official languages.

Article 17. The Mandatary shall make to the Council of the League of Nations an annual report to the satisfaction of the Council as to the measures taken during the year to carry out the provisions of this Mandate. Copies of all laws and regulations promulgated during the year to be attached to said report.

Article 18. Consent of the Council of the League required for any modification of the terms of the Mandate.

Article 19. On termination of mandate League Council to safeguard the fulfilment of financial obligations of Syria and the Lebanon, including pensions and allowances assumed during the mandate period.

Article 20. If any dispute whatever should arise between the Mandatary and another member of the League of Nations relating to the interpretation or the application of the provisions of the Mandate, such disputes, if they cannot be settled by negotiation, shall be submitted to the Permanent Court of International Justice.

(Other articles as follows: (7) Extradition; (9-10) Autonomy of religious communities; (12) Technical international agreements; (13) League measures for combating disease; (14) antiquities.)
